

Structural Functionalism on the Case of Lopez's Family

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The best theory to define the challenges that affect the Lopez's family is the structural functionalism theory. Structural functionalism theory interprets the behavior of people and institutions based on their interactions with other institutions (Hammond & Cheney, 2018). The reason for choosing this theory is because it would be the most appropriate tool to investigate the relationship between recent policy changes and the changes observed within the family. The structural functionalism theory will be able to assist in investigating all the factors that have affected the family since up to its current position (Potts, Vella, Dale & Sipe, 2014).

The current challenge with the Lopez family is created by a matrix of factors that spin for more than 14 years ago. The decision by Mr. Lopez and Clara to emigrate was not voluntary. The family moved from Guatemala to escape the insecurity in the country. They, therefore, embarked on an ill-prepared journey to the United States. During their migration, Clara was pregnant and died on the way during childbirth. The dysfunctionality of the Guatemalan state government propels the Lopez's initial family into the dangerous journey. The most significant impact of this dysfunction is the death of Clara. This has a significant impact on Thomas and Gabriela who have to grow without a mother. The fact that this is a significant change can be shown by the reaction of Thomas to Gabriela. He is overly protective at school and ensures that she does not fall into bad relationships. At sixteen, Thomas wants to take the role of parenting Gabriela. The case notes also note that Thomas is disrespectful to Ms. Valeria. It is therefore certain that he does not accord her role of a mother.

At the point of entry, there is a breakdown of both Mexican and United States immigration departments. Clara bears Gabriela within the rough terrains where no one can rescue them. Apart from resulting in the death of Clara, the situation leads to the uncertain status of Gabriela's citizen. Mr. Lopez believes that they had already closed the border when the baby was born. He,

therefore, believes that the child is American. However, it is not possible for him to ascertain this claim. Gabriela's citizenship status, therefore, remains contested. The difference in the citizenship status is created by the inefficiency of the government and state registration systems. The Lopez's have now resided in the United States for more than 14 years. All the children have grown up in the US and therefore deserve the citizenship status. The varied status of their citizenship creates tension within the family. The family is increasingly becoming intolerant to David's jokes. David is sure of his American citizenship status. It is possible that the other children think that he makes insensitive jokes because he does not suffer the same fate as Thomas and Gabriela. This is especially true for Thomas who is certain that he is not an American citizen. He is reported to be angry and suspicious of everyone.

The current problems with the Lopez family are instigated by fear and despair. These are challenges that are caused by current government policies. Within the Trump administration, there has been an increased attempt to expunge illegal immigrants from the United States. While the aim has to be the deportation of the illegal immigrants, it has made it more difficult for those who are viable for citizenship to apply for it. This begins within the immigration offices where the officers may be biased towards certain minorities. The institutions of such positions by the government which encourage nationalistic tendencies trickle down and encourage junior officers to withhold services to some people. Immigration officers can take advantage of the current confusion to delay the processing of immigration requests. Mrs. Lopez's family has been deported which means that they no longer have any extended family. Families are a major source of social support for the minority communities. This is the primary reason why these communities tend to leave in a particular neighborhood. The extended family provides a form of security for a family. This has been stripped suddenly from the Lopez family and therefore

creates a significant disturbance. Not only is the security associated with family withdrawn, it is psychologically burdensome to love far away from them.

Apart from the emotional support associated with being close to one's family, there are other problems that arise from the departure of Valeria's family. Among these problems are the economic implications of keeping in touch. Having been deported, the family may not have any source of income and therefore the Lopez's may have to support them. This introduces a new cost to the already financially challenged family. Mr. Lopez works in agricultural farms for a maximum of eight months a year. This means that the entire family survives on a single income for more than four months in a year. Mrs. Lopez is an elementary school teacher which means her income is still small. Previously, the family of Valeria could provide child sitting services for the family. After their deportation, the role has moved to Gabriela who is 14 years old. This has psychological impacts on her. It might have resulted in her current aimlessness as she feels that she is only taken as a caregiver, the problem is further aggravated by her father. The immigration has placed Mr. Lopez in a new culture which he does not understand. His views on gender equity are already seen as radically opposed to what is expected in the mainstream United States. He says that he does not see a problem with the fact that Gabriela is disturbed at school because it will not stop her from getting a good husband and caring for her only children in the future.

Gabriela is therefore impacted on by two significant dysfunctions. First of all, like the entire family, she is unsure of her ultimate citizenship. If the government and state officers decide that she is not born in the United States, she will automatically take up the citizenship of her parents. This will mean that she becomes automatically viable for deportation together with her father (Brabeck, Lykes & Hunter, 2014). This is the same problem that Thomas undergoes through.

The failing grades are a sign of distraction. He is probably also questioning the need to put any

effort when the residency status is not guaranteed. The history of the parents in Guatemala does not encourage the children that they will have a better future in case they are deported. Together with the chances that the family could be deported, Gabriela faces the challenge of cultural clash (Brabeck, Lykes & Hunter, 2014). At home, the father furthers the ideology that men are the one who should study and women should get married and take care of children. While Lope is angry with Thomas and David for not taking seriously the opportunity for education that they have, he is not bothered if Gabriela does not study. This insinuates that Gabriela is expected to do the entire 'feminine' tasks home such as child seat David and other chores. Furthermore, she does not have anyone to encourage her to in her studies.

The social welfare institutions also impact on the family. Besides struggling financially, the family is possibly above the wage bracket where it can qualify for governmental assistance on rent, healthcare, and other factors. The poor economic conditions, especially on the minorities of the United States, make it difficult for them to seek therapy (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, n.d.). There is also inadequate communal psychological care that furthers the stigma against mental health care. In communities that are especially patrilineal such as the Hispanic communities, there is a lot of prejudice against mental health. Seeking psychological help is deemed as something for the weak. This is especially so for men who compose the larger segment of the Lopez family. It is necessary to avail cheaper and available counseling care for such families (Kingsbury & Scanzoni, n.d.). Apart from the expenses of counseling, the immigration status of the families discourages them from seeking social services such as therapy. This is an indication of the depth of distrust between the family and government institutions. This can be extrapolated to the rest of the community. People anticipate that any contact with the government institutions will automatically result in deportation.

This can be connected to Thomas' feelings of suspicion and anger at the sudden threat of deportation. Since he entered the country at two years old, he has no connection with Guatemala. All his friends are in the US and it is the place he can call home. The sudden realization that he does not belong erodes any sense of trust. If he cannot trust his country, then he cannot trust any other institution related to it. This includes the education system (Thompson, 2013). In any case, he feels it is not worth to study if eventually he cannot be employed in the state. In most cases, the realization that one does not belong pushes a person to crime-related activity in an attempt to forget. This can explain why Thomas no longer hands in his assignments.

Although the current relationship with the government and other institutions contributes to a significant difficult, there is a benefit in relating to the education system. All the three children, regardless of their residency status have been enrolled in a public school. Universal education is an important factor in ensuring the possibility of social mobility. The opportunity to go to school also enables the children to integrate into the American society. It is therefore important that the children have the opportunity to go to school. Additionally, with the children at school, the family has an access to therapy through the school counseling system. The social workers at school are able to recognize changes in the children that are an indication of family disturbances at home. Currently, the couple has taken the step to go to therapy through a recommendation from Thomas' high school.

The best form of support for the family is group therapy. The family is struggling with similar problems. However, due to different coping mechanisms, each of them has been isolated into their own world (Fontes & Guardalabene, 1976). There is a silent conflict between the older children and David. While he has his biological mother, is bright and funny and definitely an American, the others do not have the same privileges. Although various things may be done to

David because he is younger, such as defending him in case of a conflict, it may always be misconstrued as favoritism. This is especially so if the defense comes from the mother who is not the parent of the other two children. If Mr. Lopez expresses his satisfaction with the fact that Gabriela has no other role but to get married and have children, he probably expresses the same sentiments to the wife. As a whole, the unity of the family is threatened by the deportation possibility (Nessel, 2013). If Mr. Lopez and the two older siblings are deported, the family will break. Mrs. Lopez and David will have to move to Guatemala or remain alone in the US. Group counseling will above all help the family members establish that none of them is the cause of the current tribulations. It is therefore not useful for the families to fight against each other. It will foster unity and a sense of belonging that can help each person navigate the current challenges.

The case of the Lopez family presents the ever-recurrent challenge of social justice for the minorities in the United States. Although the country itself was born of migrant communities, there are continued xenophobic tendencies against minorities. There is need to change policies to cater for individuals who enter the US especially when children (Nessel, 2013). Past a certain number of years in residency, these individuals should be free to register as citizens of the United States. The Caritas and professionalism in social work propose goodwill and wellbeing for everyone. It is the role of social workers to be charitable in preserving the dignity of everyone. This is why social workers attempt to restore the dignity of everyone regardless of their social economic status. Caritas and professionalism in social work would, therefore, recommend equal rights and opportunities for young people like Thomas and Gabriela of whom America is home.

With regards to this topic, the coursework taught the dynamic of families and how various factors interact to produce significant impacts in a human being (Teater, 2016). Studying human

behavior enables one to identify the causes of various tendencies to different members of the family. All the theories learned in social work such as conflict and feminist can be used to understand the significance of various events. For example, the conflict theory can help to define the impact of the Guatemala conflict on the young Lopez family. On the other hand, the feminist theory can help in explaining the views of Mr. Lopez on the performance of his daughter and how it can affect her.

Cultural diversity can be demonstrated through the ability to treat various individuals with respect to their beliefs. Although Mr. Lopez opinion of women as expressed with his view of his daughter are unacceptable, education on cultural diversity helps in understanding his disposition. While not accepting it, one can help them understand the detrimental effects of such views. In addition, the Lopez cultural diversity is respected through the provision of everything in Spanish in case they are not able to understand English well.

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